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# YOSEMITE

NATURE NOTES

VOLUME XXXVII - NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 1958



Snow in the Valley

—N. P. S.





Captain Boling and the Mariposa Battalion entering Yosemite Valley.

—Henry Shlefeld

# YOSEMITE

## Nature Notes

in its 37th year of public service. The monthly publication of Yosemite's park naturalists and the Yosemite Natural History Association.

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NO. 2

### THE DISCOVERY OF YOSEMITE AND THE MARIPOSA

#### INDIAN WAR, 1850-1851: THE DIARIES OF ROBERT ECCLESTON

By C. Gregory Crampton\*

The exact date of its discovery by the men of the Mariposa Battalion has long been one of the most elusive facts in Yosemite's history. Until recently it was not known that any of the 105 men of Companies B and C who served in the Yosemite expedition had kept a diary or had made any record of the campaign. Historians have had to rely on meager contemporary records and principally on the book by Lafayette H. Bunnell, *The Discovery of Yosemite and the Indian War of 1851 which Led to that Event*, and some of his periodical pieces on the same theme. Bunnell was a volunteer in the Mariposa Battalion and he was in the party that discovered Yosemite Valley, but he wrote of these events years after they happened and his memory played him tricks. He could not be sure of the actual date when the fifty-seven men under the command of Major James D. Savage entered the Valley to apprehend the Yosemite Indians. The short news accounts

of the Mariposa Indian War are silent on most details. In the absence of more complete evidence it has been concluded that the effective discovery occurred on March 25, 1851.

The first chapter in Yosemite's history may now be revised. The first

Robert Eccleston



\*University of Utah Press, 1957. Available from the Yosemite Natural History Association, \$6.90 including tax and postage.



day by day account of the campaigns of the Mariposa Battalion from its formation on February 12, 1851 until it was mustered out the following July 1, has come to light. This is the diary of Robert Eccleston, private in Company C, who kept a daily record of his experiences throughout the course of the Mariposa Indian War. The Eccleston record provides us with the most reliable source yet found for fixing the date of March 27, 1851 when Savage's men first entered Yosemite Valley.

Besides setting the discovery date of Yosemite back by two days, Eccleston gives us an intimate history of the Mariposa Battalion, particularly of Company C, and of the Indian war out of which it grew. He was mining at Agua Fria when, in December 1850 the Indians, resentful at the gold miners thronging about in their acorn and hunting grounds, attacked

Savage's trading post on the Fresno River and won the first round in the hostilities. In response Mariposa County Sheriff James Burney and James D. Savage organized volunteer forces and carried the action to the enemy at Battle Mountain and elsewhere. Convinced that a general outbreak was at hand, Mariposa citizens and Adam Johnston, U. S. Indian Agent, petitioned the California State government for help. Governor John McDougal was sympathetic and he ordered the formation of a volunteer force of 200 men to protect the Mariposa frontier, the cost of which he expected would be borne by the Federal Government. Eccleston's diary contains many valuable details of the election of officers and the formation of the Battalion and its preliminary movements.

Before the Battalion commenced campaigning a Federal Commission arrived to manage Indian affairs in

Prospectors such as these joined the Mariposa Battalion.

—Remington





Agua Fria sent some men.

—N. P. S.

California and it headed for the Southern Mines where a general war between the Indians and the intruding whites seemed imminent. The Mariposa Battalion was ordered to wait while the Commission invited the tribes of the Southern Mines to come in and treat. When the hostile Indians of the Mariposa county failed to appear the volunteers were ordered to bring them in by force.

The campaign began on March 19, 1851. Company A ranged southward as far as Kings River but for the most part operations were confined to the Sierra Nevada between the Merced and San Joaquin rivers. The first expedition of companies B and C led them toward the middle canyon of the Merced River and on March 27 the advance party camped on the floor of Yosemite Valley, quite probably the first white men to do so. As Luck would have it, Robert Eccleston remained at the base camp on the South Fork of the Merced and did

not see the Valley, and he has nothing descriptive of it in his diary. He does, though, supply the information which enables us to fix the discovery date with some confidence. He says on March 27 that Savage with fifty-seven men and an Indian guide left the base camp and started for the "Yosemite Camp", and he notices their return, emptyhanded, on the 29th. Bunnell, in the discovery party, gives us much detail on the event, Eccleston fixes it more accurately in time.

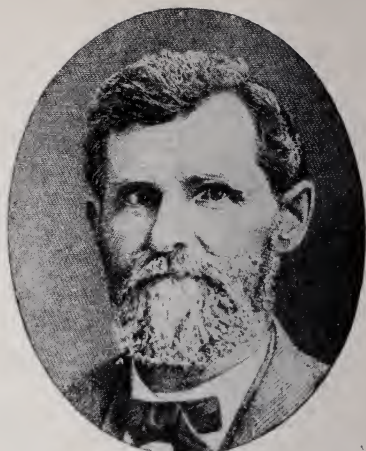
In April a second major expedition went to the upper reaches of the Fresno River, where some Big Trees were seen, to Crane Valley, and to the Chiquite and Kaiser forks region on the San Joaquin River. In May, two expeditions were sent to the High Sierra: Captain John Boling's command returned to Yosemite and went as far as Tenaya Lake while another party under Major Savage, which included Eccleston, and about



which Bunnell has nothing to say, returned to the Upper San Joaquin and went on to the divide between the headwaters of the North Fork and those of the Merced before turning back.

The High Sierra expeditions concluded the military action and the Mariposa Battalion was mustered out on July 1, 1851. Some Indians, chiefly the Yosemite, had been brought in and others had come in voluntarily. They made treaties with the Indian Commission and agreed to live in reservations extending along the base of the foothills. There they fell easy prey to the whites who moved into the Southern Mines in larger numbers once the war was over. James D. Savage, of whom Eccleston has left the best known contemporary description, returned to his life as Indian trader in charge of the San Joaquin reservation. Robert Eccleston joined his old mining associates now working along the San Joaquin River where he labored in the uncertain quest for gold until December, 1851, when his diary ends. He was on hand to see the beginnings of Fort Miller, the U. S. Army post activated in August 1851, to maintain peace in the Mariposa mines.

Robert Eccleston was believed to have been the last survivor of the Mariposa Battalion and when he died in 1914 his diaries were inherited by his son, Charles Hudson Eccleston, now living in Albany, California who has presented them to the Bancroft Library at the University of California. The diaries have now been published in two volumes and both have been distributed to the Friends of the Bancroft Library. The first which dealt with Eccleston's trip to California, was edited by George P. Hamond and Edward H. Howes



Dr. L. H. Bunnell

and appeared in 1950 under the title, *Overland to California on the Southwestern Trail, 1849* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press). The second volume was published in December, 1957, *The Mariposa Indian War, 1850-1851, Diaries of Robert Eccleston: The California Gold Rush, Yosemite, and the High Sierra* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press).

It has been my good fortune to edit the second volume which was made possible through the assistance of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hudson Eccleston, and of many helpful persons in the Bancroft Library, Mariposa, Yosemite and elsewhere, and of the University of Utah Research Fund. The Eccleston diary, a primary source for the history of Yosemite and the Mariposa region, is the first comprehensive contemporary account of important events in California's history which it illuminates in sharp detail. Its publication makes a long desired companion record. It would be interesting to know how many men in the Mariposa Battalion, an organization of over two hundred men, kept diaries or wrote letters home. Surely more than one!



## A VISIT TO THE CENTER OF THE PARK

By Robert W. Carpenter, Jr. Park Naturalist

One warm August day I was trying to decide where to hike. Being somewhat lazy, I wanted a fairly short trail and not too strenuous, some place that I had not visited before and that had scenic and photographic possibilities. There are many places around Yosemite Valley that fit this description but very few that I had not already visited at least once. Spreading out a topographic map of Yosemite I began considering the possibilities.

Let's see! If I were to drive up to Bridalveil Creek Campground I could hike in to Ostrander Lake. Or, from the Glacier Point Road, I could take a leisurely trip to the south rim of the Valley along the scenic and flowery Ohono Trail. Hm-m-m! There's Chilualna Falls above Wawona. I

haven't been there yet. No, it would be pretty dry. I'll save that for next May or June. How about the Tioga Pass Road? A hike to the top of El Capitan from the Old Big Oak Flat Road below Tamarack Flat? Or to the rim of the Grand Canyon of the Tuolumne River from Harden Lake, driving beyond White Wolf Lodge?

Say! Here's May Lake and Mt. Hoffmann. About a month before, I had hiked from Tuolumne Meadows to Glen Aulin and Waterwheel Falls and out to May Lake and the Tioga Pass Road. But I didn't have time then (or, to be frank, I was too tired) to climb Mt. Hoffmann. Let's see! From the May Lake Junction on the Tioga Pass Road to the top of Mt. Hoffmann would be a climb of about 2,000 feet and a round trip back to the

Mt. Hoffman and the High Sierra from Sentinel Dome.

—Anderson



road of about 6 or 7 miles. That's it, then - a trip to the center of the park. What will I need to take with me? Lunch, camera, binoculars, an extra shirt in case it gets cool on top and, of course, my comfortable hiking shoes.

It was still early when I arrived at the May Lake Junction so I started leisurely along the trail, pausing off and on to examine a strange flower or to admire a familiar one; to tease a chipmunk by making squeaking noises; to watch some juncos, chickadees and nuthatches busily picking their meals from the ground litter, the undersides of the tree branches and the crevices of the bark. Mt. Hoffmann, bathed in the early morning sunlight, was looming up ahead. The trail was cool and refreshing in the shadows of the red firs, white pines and hemlocks.

At the May Lake High Sierra Camp just a few people were beginning to stir. Someone was getting

into a rowboat to go out into the lake and try his luck at landing the trout that were jumping and rippling the otherwise mirror-smooth surface. Following the trail to the left of the lake I saw a marmot sunning himself on a rock about 150 feet to one side. By maneuvering behind a large boulder between the marmot and myself I narrowed this distance to about 20 feet hoping to get a picture. Peeking cautiously around the boulder I saw that Mr. Marmot was still enjoying the sun but was looking directly toward me. Trying for a better position I climbed up the slanting boulder and set my camera. It was a nice try, but, while I edged over the top the marmot disappeared.

Continuing along the trail I came all of a sudden to the edge of a meadow in which several deer were peacefully feeding. Fortunately I was downwind and in the shade of some small lodgepole pines so that I had not been discovered by the deer.

Panorama from Tioga Road near Yosemite Creek.

—Anderson







Mt. Starr King and the Clark Range.

—Anderson

standing perfectly still I counted six does, seven fawns and a big buck whose antlers were in velvet. In a few minutes two more does and a fawn appeared at the far end of the meadow. One of the does seemed quite concerned as she anxiously scanned the meadow. Then, as one of the fawns raced toward her, she relaxed and stretched her front legs forward so that her chest almost touched the ground in greeting her youngster who had strayed away. The fawn then proceeded to help himself to some warm milk.

Wishing to get close enough to capture this peaceful scene on film I crept slowly forward on hands and knees through the small pines at the edge of the clearing. I hadn't gone far when I was startled by a snort coming from about 100 feet to my left among the trees. A doe, perhaps acting as a sort of sentry, had betrayed my presence. She snorted again, warning the others who quickly disappeared among the trees.

Only the buck remained. Trotting slowly toward the far end of the meadow he seemed to be attracting attention and exposing himself to any dangers while the rest of the herd sought safety. Again no pictures but a very rewarding observation of one of nature's endless dramas.

Beyond the meadow the trees grew smaller and sparser as the trail started winding up the rocky slope of Mt. Hoffmann. Several fat marmots could be seen at one time waddling over the rocks. During the whole trip I must have seen at least two dozen of these overgrown ground squirrels, some of them at elevations of at least 9500 feet. At about the same elevation three bucks came crashing out of a white bark pine thicket where they had bedded down to get out of the midday sun.

With the opening up of the forest the panorama of Yosemite started unfolding. Among the first peaks to be recognized were Cloud's Rest and Half Dome, appearing close enough

to touch but yet several miles away. As I climbed higher, more familiar peaks came into view - Mt. Clark, the Lyell group, then, from the summit of Mt. Hoffmann at 10,002 feet above sea level, Cathedral Peak, Mt. Gibbs, Mt. Dana, Mt. Conness. All seemed to be greeting me as old friends. Although it was a wonderfully clear day I was unable to single out and name any peaks in the maze of mountains north of Conness. Looking west, it seemed as though the mountains rolled on and on. It was even clear enough to see the Coast Range over 100 miles away. This was truly the geographical center of Yosemite. I felt like a tiny speck on the wall

model of the Sierra in the Yosemite Museum.

As I was eating my lunch and drinking in with my eyes the vast panorama laid out before me I thought about the crowded conditions in Yosemite Valley. Here, just an hour's drive and a three-hour hike from the Valley, I was completely alone with miles and miles of wilderness on all sides. If the people in the Valley would only spread out more they, too, could be enjoying some of this wonderful scenery. My thought bubble was broken as I heard voices and saw four hikers approaching the summit of my granite tower.

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## FOR OUR YOUNGER READERS

**By Ralph Frazier, Ranger Naturalist**

(Author's note: It has been brought to the attention of the writer that subscriptions to "Nature Notes" are made out quite often in the name of a child and that we have very few articles written primarily for children. The following was written for our younger readers but could be of interest to readers of all ages.)

So many of us start out with our parents for a wonderful place like Yosemite—happy, excited, and looking forward to the new and thrilling things that we will see. We are not disappointed! Everything is just as we were told that it would be. The waterfalls, so high above us, make our hearts beat faster as we see them come tumbling down. The Steller's jay and the blackheaded grosbeak



We listen to the ranger naturalist talk.

—Bullard





Sometimes a deer wants to hear too.

—McIntyre

ake us laugh by means of their funny antics as they fight over a piece of bread that the boldest stole from the picnic table. The deer in the meadow seem so tame even though the rangers tell us that they have injured boys and girls such as us with their sharp hooves when they have become frightened. Some of us are even lucky enough to see a real, live bear. We notice that the tracks the leaves look almost human and that the fur on his back sways from side to side as he moves clumsily along. It's all so new to us that we have lots of questions. They just come tumbling out. Sometimes there is no one around to answer them. We are lucky, though. We can listen to

the talks given by the ranger-naturalists during the day at the museum. Some of us are interested in snakes and how they move.

The ranger naturalist says, "Suppose that you had no arms and legs. You wouldn't be able to come to dinner when your mother called; and, even if you did get to the table, you wouldn't have any arms with which to lift the food to your mouth. What would you do? Let's see what the snake does."

Then he goes on to say that the snake has more rib bones than we have. He has big scales which are attached to his belly by their front edges. As he moves his ribs, the scales move forward and hook onto



The children love the museum.

—McIntyre

the ground by the loose back edge so that his body moves forward. But there is more to the story. He can coil himself into loops and can throw the front part of his body forward quite quickly. The rattlesnake does this when he strikes. The snake's lower jaw is made up of two parts. He can move one side of his jaw and then the other. By doing this he can swallow a mouse without using any hands!

We have always been a little bit afraid of snakes but after the ranger-naturalist allows us to handle such beautiful snakes as the coral-bellied ring-necked snake and the Sierra mountain king, we find that they are not slimy and that they love to be held by us. We are sad to learn that many people kill the mountain king because they think that it is the poisonous coral snake. We are anxious to know how we, as animal friends, can tell the difference between them. He tells us something

that we will always remember. The poisonous coral snake always has a yellow ring on each side of the black rings. The mountain king which we find in California has only one yellow ring next to each black ring.

On one of the nature walks a little girl tells the ranger-naturalist that she has enjoyed watching the many different birds that they have seen but she doesn't get to see many birds when she is at home in the city. Everyone seems interested in the little girl's remark, so the ranger-naturalist says that he is going to write an article for "*Yosemite Nature Notes*" telling boys and girls how to make the birds come to their window sills and be fed.

With the thought that an article is going to be written just for us in a little magazine that we love, we are better able to leave Yosemite. Gosh! wouldn't it be nice to come back when there is snow on the ground. When we ask Mom if we can, she says, "We'll see, We'll see".



# Poems From The Mountains



## The Great Horned Owl

By Allan Shields

Prowler of the midnight forest,  
Taloned death on silent wings,  
Master flutist, what's your quest  
Gliding beneath the wide moon-rings?



Perched atop the tallest cedar,  
Outlined full against night sky,  
Are there any night-eyes keener?  
Does your call end with a sigh?

Hunter with a constant question,  
Symbol of the wiser choice,  
Does your sadness cause you mention  
Nightly search in muted voice?

Feathered guardian of the silence  
Play the role, then seek your rest.  
We, too, find nocturnal solace  
When at least we go to nest.



## CLASSMATE OF THE SEQUOIA

By David Essel, Ranger Naturalist

"... The oldest living thing on earth, . . . Sequoia gigantea, the Sierra redwood. Remnant of an ancient race, inured to struggle . . ." The ranger-naturalist at the campfire was telling the story of the noble tree that lifts its arms amongst the granite boulders of Yosemite. However, he was not wholly correct. Struggle? . . . yes. Noble, inspiring, awesome? . . . surely! Oldest? . . . well, not so fast. This may have been considered all right to say two years ago, but not now. No, the giant sequoia has an older living classmate. Both attended nature's exacting school together, both learned to survive in harsh extremes, and indeed the one was already in kindergarten before our oldest sequoias had sprouted.

Facing the precipitous eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada lie the White Mountains, 20-40 miles distant, separated by the Owens Valley. Here in the rarefied air of a wind-swept plateau in Inyo National Forest at 11,000 feet altitude grow the shrub-shaped bristlecone pine (*Pinus aristata*), oldest living thing known on earth; older by centuries than the nearly 4,000 years of its Sierra neighbor.

Usually growing to a height of 15-30 feet, these trees are dwarfed by the nearly 300 feet of the sequoia. Their trunks, too, fail to measure up to the 30 feet of some redwoods. They are normally only 1 - 1½ feet in diameter (however, one of the oldest trees, "The Patriarch" is close to 12 feet across, although this is made of many stems grown together. All these stems have arisen from the same root crown.) Its dull, reddish-

brown bark and chocolate brown cones lend color to this aged tree. Its 1½ inch long needles occur in bunches of five deep green blades clustered at the tips of its twigs.

Dr. Edmund Schulman of the University of Arizona, in the course of tree ring studies, has found through "increment borings" that these dwellers of a semi-arid region show as much as 75 annual rings to the inch. By counting these annual rings created by the different rate of growth during spring and summer seasons, it was discovered that these trees have succeeded the giant sequoia as the most ancient living thing.

The brownish-red wood, like redwood, is brittle and light in weight. It is rather coarse grained and has little use, except perhaps as fence posts in this dry region where timber is rather scarce. This should prevent its extermination through logging. Still, it is well that this region is being preserved by designating it the White Mountain National Area, for the gnarled, sand-weathered branches would still have been subject to the ravages of the souvenir hunter, using it for woodworking purposes.

It is a long way from the early days of a public uninformed and disinterested in the essentials of conservation to the present day, which witnesses the rapidity with which the 2,330 acre area of nearly pure bristlecone pine forest has been set aside for protection. In former days, when the sequoias were discovered, they were wastefully logged. This occurred with little profit to the logger, and



ly to the detriment of all succeeding generations, before anyone had a voice in protest. Happily, nearly 90% of the total remaining acreage of *Sequoia gigantea* is now in public hands, while many of the most desirable groves still in private

hands are in the process of being acquired by state or national agencies. It is well, for both of these trees have that quality of struggle and agelessness which behooves one to muse on time and the shortness of our own few years; to pause, to reflect, to ponder unknowables.

## OUT OF YOSEMITE'S PAST

### A One Picture Story



June 2, 1915—Mr. Edwin Hoffman drove the first auto of the Yosemite Stage & Turnpike Co. into Yosemite Valley over the Wawona Road.

—J. T. Boysen

*at any season*

*an*

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Winter



Winter

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